

FINAL
MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION
(with edits incorporated)

Big Basin Redwoods State Park
Waddell Estuary Enhancement and Management Project
SCH#:2001122015



August 2005



State of California
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
Acquisition and Development
Northern Service Center
One Capitol Mall – Suite 500
Sacramento, California 95814

FINAL MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

**PROJECT: BIG BASIN REDWOODS STATE PARK
 WADDELL ESTUARY ENHANCEMENT AND MANAGEMENT PROJECT**

LEAD AGENCY: California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)

AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTS:

The Initial Study for this Mitigated Negative Declaration was made available throughout the 30-day public review period at the reference desks of the Santa Cruz County Library. It was also available at the public information desks of DPR's Northern Service Center and Santa Cruz District Headquarters offices and available on DPR's website (www.parks.ca.gov). The Final Mitigated Negative Declaration and all supporting materials will be available, by request, at DPR's Santa Cruz District Headquarters.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The Department of Parks and Recreation (California State Parks) proposes to conduct resource management activities on the grounds of Big Basin Redwoods State Park. The following is a summary of the proposed work:

- Install interpretive signage;
- Improve California red-legged frog (CRLF) habitat by removal of tule mat, creation of seasonally wet ponds, and review water diversions to evaluate for appropriateness;
- Introduce natural woody material to provide western pond turtle basking sites;
- Eradicate English and cape ivy, pampas grass, poison hemlock, Monterey cypress, harding grass, and other exotic vegetation;
- Remove feral pigs in the wetland; and
- Continue studies and surveys of sensitive species (San Francisco garter snake (SFGS), black rail, western pond turtle (WPT), and CRLF).

FINDINGS

An Initial Study has been prepared to assess the proposed project's potential impacts on the environment and the significance of those impacts and is incorporated in the Draft MND. Based on this Initial Study, it has been determined that the proposed project would not have any significant impacts on the environment,. This conclusion is supported by the following findings:

- There was no potential for adverse impacts on Land Use and Planning, Population and Housing, Air Quality, Transportation/Circulation, Energy and Mineral Resources, Hazards, Public Services, Utilities and Service Systems, Noise, Cultural Resources, and Recreation associated with the proposed project.
- Potential adverse impacts resulting from the proposed project were found to be less than significant in the following areas: Geologic Problems, Water, Biological Resources, and Aesthetics.

MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation measures were not incorporated into the scope of work for the Waddell Estuary Enhancement and Management Project because the project will be implemented by DPR to avoid or minimize impacts. Project activities are designed to improve and restore habitat, and to provide a long term benefit to sensitive species present. To minimize impacts best management practices will be included in contract specifications and instructions to DPR personnel involved in implementing the project.

The following corrections, additions, and deletions have been made to the Waddell Estuary Enhancement and Management Project Draft MND. Additions and corrections are underlined; strikeout indicates a deletion. Minor punctuation, spelling, and grammatical corrections that contribute to ease of understanding, but have no significant impact on the content, have not been noted.

Page 30 Objective 6 and Action 12 will be deleted:

~~6. Enhance coho salmon habitat~~
~~Action 12. Sandbar Management~~

The above changes reflect a request to remove this objective from the final plan based on comments made by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Page 31, Section 4, Objective 2, Action 2 the following will be added:

The open water area of the turtle pond will be restored to provide benefits to the WPT, SFGS, and CRLF. This will be accomplished by crane drag line enlarging of the open water area within the turtle pond; an activity expected to take approximately 4 hours. During this restoration activity a DFG and USFWS permitted biologist will be on location to prevent the take of CRLF, SFGS and WPT by finding and relocating any of these species found within the vicinity and ensure that take does not occur. Compensation for disturbing sensitive habitat is provided by the creation of two seasonal ponds which will provide habitat for WPT, SFGS and CRLF.

DPR proposes to implement the following measures to minimize adverse effects to the SFGS, CRLF or WPT and its habitat during the restoration phase of this project.

At least 15 days prior to the onset of activities, DPR will submit the names and credentials of biologists who would conduct activities specified in this document. No project activities will begin until DPR has received written approval from the USFWS that the biologist(s) is qualified to conduct this work.

A Service-approved biologist will survey the work site at least two weeks before the onset of activities. If CRLF, WPT, or SFGS are found in the project area and these individuals are likely to be killed or injured by work activities the Service-approved biologists will be allowed sufficient time to move them from the site before work activities resume. Only service-approved biologists will participate in activities with the capture, handling, and monitoring of CRLF or SFGS.

Before any construction activities begin on a project, a Service-approved biologist will conduct a training session for all construction personnel. At a minimum, the training shall include a description of CRLF, SFGS and WPT and its habitat, the importance of the CRLF, SFGS and WPT and their habitat, the general measures that are being implemented to conserve the CRLF, SFGS and WPT as they relate to the project, and the boundaries within which the project may be accomplished. Brochures, books and briefings may be used in the training session, provided that a qualified person is on hand to answer any questions.

A Service-approved biologist shall be present at the work site until such time as removal of CRLF, SFGS and WPT, instruction of workers, and habitat disturbance has been completed. The Service-approved shall have the authority to halt any action that might result in impacts that exceed the levels anticipated by the Service during review of the proposed action. If work is stopped the service shall be notified immediately by the Service-approved biologist or on-site biological monitor.

During project activities, all trash that may attract predators will be properly contained, removed from the work site, and disposed of regularly. Following construction, all trash and construction debris will be removed from work areas.

Prior to the onset of any project-related activities, the approved biologist must identify appropriate areas to receive CRLF, SFGS and WPT adults and/or their young from the project areas. These areas must be in proximity to the capture site, contain suitable habitat, not be affected by project activities, and be free of exotic predatory species (i.e., bullfrogs, crayfish) to the best of the approved biologists knowledge.

If CRLF, SFGS and WPT are found and these individuals are likely to be killed or injured by work activities, the Service-approved biologist must be allowed sufficient time to move them from the site before work activities resume. The Service-approved biologist must relocate the CRLF, SFGS and WPT the shortest distance possible to one of the predetermined areas. The Service-approved biologist must maintain detailed records of any individuals that are moved (e.g., size, coloration, any distinguishing features, photographs (digital preferred) to assist in determining whether translocated animals are returning to the point of capture. Only CRLF, SFGS and WPT that are at risk of injury or death by project activities may be removed.

Biologists who handle CRLF or SFGS must ensure that their activities do not transmit diseases. To ensure that diseases are not conveyed between work sites by the

Service-approved biologist, the fieldwork code of practice developed by the Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force must be followed at all times.

The above changes address comments made by DFG and clarify the extent of the work.

Page 34, Section 4, Objective 3, Action 5 first sentence is revised to read:

~~Floating wooden boards~~ Natural woody material from Waddell beach will be introduced into the existing pond and proposed open water areas of the turtle pond to provide additional basking habitat for turtles

The above changes address comments made by DFG and clarify the extent of the work.

Page 35, Section 4, Objective 2, Action 3, starting at end of third paragraph is revised to read:

DPR's intention will be to create standing water from the beginning of the wet season through August September. Over time the water level will fluctuate based on the level of the water table. Four foot deep water table monitoring wells have shown water height at 6 inches during August. Based on this data water level is expected to be deep enough for CRLF breeding and metamorphosis as long as the ponds are excavated to a depth of 2-2.5 meters.

The access route for the excavation will be along the Access Road at the only location where heavy equipment can safely and easily access the area, approximately 100 yards southwest of the Ranger station (See arrow in Figure 4). Equipment will consist of a 35,000lb excavator to excavate pond material along with a loader to move soil material to storage location nearby. Excavated material will be stored near the ranger residence for 3 years, at which point, if the project is successful, the soil will be hauled to an appropriate permanent location. Equipment will be operated with safety in mind by DPR qualified personnel or by an equally qualified contractor.

Excavation will occur during the dry season to reduce impact and compaction in the wetland. Created ponds will be monitored annually during the time of CRLF metamorphosis to ensure adequate amount of water for larvae to transform. Ponds will also be monitored for water depth, vegetative succession, and utilization by CRLF and SFGS. If annual monitoring shows the seasonal ponds to be ineffective and a population sink for frogs, then the ponds will be filled in with the material that was removed. Project activities are designed to improve and restore habitat, and to provide a long term benefit to sensitive species present. All impacts from these actions are temporary and can be minimized to avoid take of the species.

The above changes address comments made by DFG and biologists, and clarify the extent of the work.

Page 35 Objective 4 Action 6, this paragraph added to end of Action 6:

Eradication will be done in such a way as to minimize disturbance to native vegetation and habitats; all exotic eradication sites will monitored over time to prevent recolonization.

The above changes clarify the extent of the work.

Page 35, Section 4, the following introduction has been added to Objective 5:

Objective 5. Increase knowledge of sensitive species

Studies are called for in the recovery plan for the SFGS. Sensitive species studies will be designed in consultation with USFWS and CDFG representatives and conducted by a state and/or federal permit holder for each species. The studies that call for capture of animals have the potential to cause take, this potential will be thoroughly evaluated by the permit holders and precautions will be made against causing take. Scientific collection permits and California Endangered Species Act review will be obtained before studies commence. All impacts from these actions are temporary and can be minimized to avoid take of the species.

The above changes address comments made by DFG and clarify the extent of the work.

Page 36 Objective 6 will be removed:

~~Objective 6. Enhance coho salmon habitat.~~

~~Action 12. Sandbar Management~~

~~The sandbar will be managed to ensure complete closure during summer to provide for high lagoon water levels and freshwater conversion, both components of high quality rearing habitat for aquatic species. In addition, the sandbar will be managed to ensure breaching during winter to allow for access by adult coho entering the watershed to spawn and access by smolt emigrating to the ocean.~~

The above changes reflect a request to remove this Objective from the final plan based on comments made by NMFS, DFG, and USFWS.

Changes are reflected in the final Waddell Estuary Enhancement and Management Project Plan.

This document, along with the Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (SCH#2004072144), corrected as noted above; Comments and Response to Comments; Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program; and the Notice of

Determination, constitute the Final Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Waddell Estuary Enhancement and Management Project at Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

Pursuant to Section 21082.1 of the California Environmental Quality Act, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has independently reviewed and analyzed the Initial Study and Negative Declaration for the proposed project and finds that these documents reflect the independent judgment of DPR. DPR, as lead agency, also confirms that the project guidelines detailed in these documents are feasible and will be implemented as stated in the Negative Declaration.

Original signed by Victor Roth
Victor Roth
Environmental Coordinator
Santa Cruz District

8/17/05
Date

Original signed by Theodore Jackson, Jr.
Theodore Jackson, Jr.
Deputy Director
Park Operations Division

8-25-05
Date